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HOSPITAL AND TRAINING SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

ALICE SHEPARD GILMAN, R.N., DEPARTMENT EDITOR

SUPERVISION IN A CHANGING AGE¹

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THAT this is a changing age admits of no argument, although there may be differences of opinion as to whether the spiritual penury so often discussed is not more apparent than real. The causes of the changes that sometimes seem almost kaleidoscopic are at once so deep rooted and so far reaching as to preclude any discussion here. This paper is concerned with the effect and primarily with the effect upon youth of the tremendous changes going on about us; for changes in those who supervise are frequently due to changes in those supervised, thus youth is changing us.

It is customary for writers on this subject to analyze the situation under such headings as religious, economic, social, and educational. Few beside the "incorrigible" optimists find good in the present economic situation; churches and social workers are striving as never before to fight the forces of evil; in the educational field alone one finds ground for a great hope that all is not as dark as it seems. Universities and colleges all over the country are reporting record breaking enrollments and our stronger schools for nurses are reporting maximum classes. One might attribute the increased enrollment of student nurses wholly to the economic depression were it not for that mighty wave of youth entering institutions where education is *not* paid for by physical labor, but actually in money at so much per point. Is it too much to believe that the causes of this great movement are fundamentally fine and sound and not merely an expression of a desire for better "jobs" than would otherwise be possible?

Having looked on this brighter side of the result of the unrest of the past few years, let us look for a moment at the less pleasing phases. Many sociological treatises and some popular books have been written upon the lax morals of the rising generation,—the generation to which we look for the continuance of our own work. Some social workers are deeply concerned over the increase of immorality among college students. Edna Ferber, in her novel, "The Girls," is conceded to have described very accurately the young woman of today

¹ Read at the annual convention of the New York State Nurses' Association, Utica, October 27, 1921.

who she says belongs to "the modern school that despises sentiment and frowns upon weakly emotional display, *to whom rebellion is a normal state*; clear-eyed, remorseless, honest, frivolous, terrifying; the first woman since Eve to tell the truth and face the consequences."

The ambitions of such young women have to do solely with opportunities for self-expression. Indeed it is probable that some of them acknowledge no higher duty. This is the type that is entering our schools for nurses and it is evident that the very term supervision is at war with their ideas. Our problem is so to guide them that the urge for self-expression may develop into initiative and sound achievement rather than in the license they mistake for freedom.

Supervision, within the meaning of this paper, is intended to include the educational, guiding and restraining influence of all the members of a faculty whatever their official designation. We all know the old style of supervision,—we grew up under it and many of us have attempted to carry it on,—we know all too well that it partook largely of the mental quality of a policeman on his beat, of an alertness to infractions of the law rather than to opportunities for helpfulness. Errors were constantly pointed out and emphasized; some effort there was to assist in overcoming difficulties, but the method all too frequently was that of "trial and error," with severe penalties for the errors. Proud indeed in those days was the student who won commendation. Probably every person here recalls the story once current, of the superintendent who replied to a student who wished her "good morning" with a curt, "Speak when you are spoken to." An exaggerated case, you will say, but the attitude was *not* uncommon. It was a method that put needed iron into one's constitution but it did not make for close communion between students and faculty. Dire indeed was the trouble or the problem that forced us to voluntarily seek faculty assistance.

It is the barest justice to that magnificent older group to whom we owe so much to pause here to acknowledge our *unending debt* to them for the soundness of the structure which they started. Stern with others, they were always much more demanding of themselves than of those about them. I am endeavoring only to emphasize the fact that they worked for us rather than with us. This may be what is needed today, but the present generation of students will have none of it. They cannot conceive of our ignoring them, even for a moment. They demand personal and almost constant attention whether on or off duty. They expect commendation for that which is good and they expect much assistance with that which is difficult. Their "felt needs" are much more apt to be expressed than were those of their sisters of even a few years ago. They expect, indeed demand,

both the "how" and the "why" before giving a treatment or carrying out a procedure or before submitting to a regulation. The rising generation is by no means inarticulate and it is ruthless in its judgments.

What is required of those who successfully guide and supervise these young women? The answer cannot be given without asking another question. What kind of nurses do we *want* to send out? Let us assume that the answer is, as I believe it to be, that we want to graduate nurses who are well grounded in the fundamental theory and technic of nursing, who have a quickened perception of opportunities for expansion and growth, an appreciation of the relation of nurses to the whole fabric of society and with a compelling urge to better society as they find it. Such nurses will find almost unlimited opportunity for self expression in the newer forms of nursing.

What of the qualifications of those who supervise? Aside from the purely professional qualifications which we all know, what does this dynamic and unawed student of today expect, indeed demand of those who teach?

1. Respect for her (the student's) individuality,—first and foremost. She has little tendency and no desire to conform to any pattern save that of her contemporaries.
2. Thorough preparation for the position occupied. Students' respect cannot be held by pretense of a learning that cannot be demonstrated. Nothing so gains a student's respect and admiration as a skillfully demonstrated procedure or a well planned class or lecture. They are critical of teaching methods.
3. They expect breadth of interests and a recognized and honored place in the community. Are there perhaps two phases to our present difficulty in securing enough people for responsible positions? First, the acknowledged distaste of many of the younger generation for responsibility, and second, may it be that the lives of the "training" school personnel seem to them so hedged in as to be unattractive?

In actual practice, as demonstrated by some of our more successful superintendents and their associates, we find students spending hours, instead of minutes as of old, in self-sought conferences with those faculty members who have made such conferences possible. The really successful instructor, head nurse, or supervisor is she who is constantly sought out for advice and help, but this cannot come about unless she is really accessible. Some superintendents make a practice of being available for informal evening conferences without seeming to do so. An open or a closed door frequently proves the determining factor in a student's effort to arrive at a decision in a situation in which she should have advice.

We find a totally changed "off duty" attitude. For example, in

one large school an expected dancing teacher failed to arrive. The superintendent, modern young woman as she is, asked the disappointed group if *she* would do as a substitute and gave a dancing lesson herself! Students in this school recently raised the nucleus of an endowment fund and turned it over to the alumnae for further development.

Can you imagine the students of other years singing that far from classic college song, "She Ain't Got No Style," as happened recently in a well known school, to the head of a school or hospital; or a battle of wits as to who could put up the cleverest posters, the students as an invitation to a party, or the faculty in reply? This latter school is directed by a woman who, for years before student government was inaugurated, had only three *rules* for students, and they had to do with such matters as punctuality at meals. The influence of that woman is almost world wide, because her graduates are made self reliant by the confidence placed in them as students. Another such director recently remarked: "My senior class and I were not understanding each other very well last spring and I decided (now you needn't laugh) that it was because I did not love them enough." Having reached a decision she set about a cure, with the result that when serious trouble came to her a few months later it was the *senior* class, long so troublesome, that gave the greatest support. Her graduates are doing much pioneer work in their own state because they know that they can always return "home" for assistance. Her most recent effort is directed toward getting the students (who are so very young) to confide their love affairs to her and she is justifiably proud of the number who have already sought such needed guidance. Who knows what tragedies may not have been averted?

Student government succeeds in such schools, as it is founded on mutual respect of student for student, and upon faculty appreciation of the students' efforts and sincerity. One has only to recall the instances in which directors of schools have accepted student councils' recommendations for the dismissal of one of their own number, to realize how radical the change has been. It is obvious that it could not succeed were the students not constantly in contact with supervisors who are setting an example of open-mindedness and of confidence in others' integrity. An experienced and skillful worker with girls recently remarked, "It is a time to ignore mere conventions and to put all effort into the development of the fundamental moral sense of our young women." Is it not so in our schools? We, too, must stress the fundamentals both moral and professional. The time has gone by for a too rigid adherence to convention. Let us have less emphasis on seniority, as such, and more emphasis on

worthy achievement. Let us have less emphasis on the day's work, as such, and more emphasis on the actual growth in knowledge of the student. Let us emphasize achievement in terms of actual preventive and remedial care rather than in terms of so many baths, and treatments, and nourishments. Let us help the student understand her own contribution to the health of a community. What higher form of self-expression could she desire? These things can be brought about only by an increasingly intimate contact of supervisor with student, but I am convinced that the closer the personal relation between those of an older and presumably wiser generation, a generation that inherited the spiritual ideals of the founders of modern nursing, and this eager, open-eyed, courageous younger group the safer will be the cherished ideals of our profession and the wider will be the horizon of those who follow us.

WHO'S WHO IN THE NURSING WORLD

VII. ELIZABETH E. GOLDING

BIRTHPLACE: New Orleans, La. PARENTAGE, American. PRESENT OCCUPATION, Private Duty Nursing. EDUCATION, Grammar and high school. GRADUATE OF: New York Hospital Training School, New York. POSITIONS HELD: Ward assistant, Ft. Wadsworth, during part of Spanish-American War; Superintendent of New York Hospital Nurses' Club. OFFICES HELD: Vice-President, New York Hospital Nurses' Alumnae Association; President, New York County Registered Nurses' Association; President, New York State Nurses' Association; Treasurer, New York Branch Guild of St. Barnabas; Member of Committee of Management, Central Club for Nurses, New York; Director, American Nurses' Association; Chairman, Relief Fund Committee, American Nurses' Association.

"IN our novitiate of service, we must turn away from money and all the things that pertain to money. If we are to serve humanity without faltering or failing, we must make up our minds at the start that we are never going to have money, or even want it. We see this perfectly illustrated in the case of certain professions which are wholly given over to ideals of service—the ministry, teaching, social service, nursing, medicine. There is much complaint these days at the miserable income which is earned by the average member of these professions. The complaint is sound, for this income is in many cases inadequate to sustain life. But nobody has ever argued, on the basis of this complaint, that the income for a minister, or teacher, or social worker, should be lifted above a certain respectable minimum."

From "The Novitiate of Service," John Haynes Holmes.